

## 8 Comma Rules

*Directions: After each rule and example, add commas to the sentences where needed.*

### 1) Use commas to separate items in a list of three or more.

Remember that an "item" may refer to a noun, verb, or adjective phrase.

**Note:** Usage of a comma to separate the second-to-last from the last item is optional.

Example: I need to buy eggs milk lettuce and bread.

I need to buy eggs, milk, lettuce, and bread.

1. Carlos wants to visit Paris Italy Germany and China.
2. My favorite colors are blue red and pink.
3. I like to go hiking fishing swimming and camping during summer.
4. I have to clean my room walk the dog and take out the trash.
5. The tree is very tall old and green.
6. I need to visit my mother wash my car and buy six stamps.

### 2) Use a comma to separate independent clauses (complete thoughts) when they are joined by the following conjunctions:

<i>and</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>nor</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>but</i>	<i>yet</i>
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**Note:** The comma should come *before* the conjunction.

Example: I want to buy the new jacket but it is too expensive.

I want to buy the new jacket, but it is too expensive.

In this example, there are two independent clauses:

#1: "*I want to buy the new jacket.*" (complete thought)

#2 "*It is too expensive.*" (complete thought)

These clauses are separated by a *comma* before the conjunction "*but*".

1. We can go to the zoo or we can go to the movie theater.
2. They like chocolate but they like vanilla better.

3. We will go to the restaurant now for we are very hungry.
4. I do not like biology nor do I like chemistry.
5. James wants to leave now yet we must wait for his little brother.
6. Terry is working on a project and he should be finished with it next week.

**3) Use a comma to separate a dependent clause (incomplete thought) from an independent clause (complete thought).**

Here are some examples of sentences with dependent and independent clauses:

- 1) When I get older, I will be able to drive. → (Dependent), (Independent).
- 2) If you are good, I will buy you a toy. → (Dependent), (Independent).

Example: Without water the plant will die.

Without water, the plant will die.

1. In five minutes the building will be closed.
2. When I get home I am going to brush my teeth.
3. Until I reach my goal I will not stop working.
4. If I get a new job I will be very happy.
5. To become an astronaut it takes much hard work and determination.
6. Because she is only twelve she is not old enough to drive.

**4) Use a comma(s) to separate any word or phrase from the rest of the sentence that is not essential to the sentence's meaning. This phrase usually provides extra information about the subject.**

Here are some examples of sentences with words/phrases that are not essential to the sentence's meaning:

- 1) My brother, a 26 year old male, is watching TV.
- 2) Amy Rivers, my best friend, is going to the mall today.
- 3) I am ready for my dad, a hard working man, to come home.

Example: My mother on the other hand does not like chocolate.

My mother, on the other hand, does not like chocolate.

1. Daniel Garrison a farmer wakes up very early.
2. Tanner my teacher is wearing a gray shirt.
3. The car a 1967 ford mustang is very fast.
4. When school ends today at 3:15 p.m. we will play soccer.
5. Gold watches for example are going on sale today.
6. My favorite color navy blue is very popular.

**5) Use a comma to separate a quotation from the rest of a sentence.**

Example: "We need to buy more sugar" she said "before it runs out!"

"We need to buy more sugar," she said, "before it runs out!"

1. "I am tired" he muttered.
2. He said "We need to lower taxes!"
3. "If I don't wake up in time" he whispered "I will be in trouble."
4. "Today will be rainy" the weatherman said with a frown.
5. The boy watched his mother and wondered "Could I ever be that strong?"
6. "Okay" spoke the teacher excitedly "Time's up!"

**6) Use a comma to separate an introductory element from the rest of a sentence.**

Example: Hi how are you?

Hi, how are you?

1. Yes I would like more water please.
2. Sorry we do not have enough room.
3. Well I hope the problem will be fixed soon.
4. However I am very good at math.
5. Wait is there another way?
6. Unfortunately we do not have enough time.

**7) Use a comma to separate the name of a city from a country or state.**

Example: I live in Chapel Hill North Carolina.

I live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

1. We are moving to Spokane Washington.
2. I visited Florence Italy last summer.
3. The hurricanes hit Tulsa Oklahoma and Destin Florida.

**8) Use a comma to separate the day of the week, the day of the month, and the year.**

Example: Today is Thursday April 18 1943.

Today is Thursday, April 18, 1943.

1. Tomorrow will be Sunday December 2.
2. George Washington was born on February 22 1732.
3. I will be sixteen on Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1582.
4. September 11 2001 is a date that will be remembered.

## Quotation Marks

American style quotation marks have six primary functions:

- 1) When repeating someone's exact words
  - 2) To show irony
  - 3) To show an unusual usage of a word or phrase
  - 4) To refer to a word itself rather than its associated meaning
  - 5) To refer to nicknames and false titles
- 

### 1) When repeating someone's exact words

Example: "I feel sleepy," Jim said.

In this example, the speaker is repeating Jim's exact words, "I feel sleepy." Notice that a comma (or a question mark, exclamation point, or period) is used inside the quotation mark where Jim's exact words are interrupted by the speaker.

Example: Jim said, "I feel sleepy."

Again, the speaker is repeating Jim's exact words, "I feel sleepy." Notice that a comma is used before the quotation mark where the speaker's words are interrupted by Jim's exact words. Also notice that the first letter of the quoted speech is capitalized, and that punctuation used at the end of the sentence comes inside the final quotation mark.

Example: "I feel sleepy," Jim said, "But I don't want to go to bed!"

In this example, two of Jim's phrases are repeated. The speaker interrupts the phrases to provide the reader information about them.

Example: "Jim said, 'I feel sleepy,'" recalled Jacob.

In this example, the speaker is repeating Jacob's exact words, who is repeating Jim's exact words. When you have a quotation inside a quotation, use a single quotation mark to offset it.

Note: Quotation marks are unnecessary when paraphrasing someone's exact words.

Example: "Help!" cried Ana.

In this example, we are repeating Ana's exact words. Therefore, we need to use quotation marks.

Example: Ana cried for help.

In this example, we are paraphrasing Ana's exact words. Therefore, we *do not* need to use quotation marks.

Directions: Punctuate the following sentences.

- 1) I got an A on my test said Ko.
- 2) The president said that we should Win the war in six months
- 3) I would like to go with you Jenny said But I don't have enough money
- 4) I hate you she screamed And I never want to see you again
- 5) Tommy told us not to Tell his secret said Billy So we didn't

Directions: Now write two of your own sentences using quotation marks to repeat someone's exact words.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_

## 2) To show irony

Example: My friend energetic claimed that he was "too tired" to help me.

In this example, quotation marks are used to offset the phrase "too tired" because it is ironical. The speaker is trying to show the reader that the friend was not too tired, and that there must have been a better reason for his unwillingness to help.

Directions: Punctuate the following sentences.

- 1) Desoto said that he would be patient for thirty seconds.
- 2) I can't stand it when my brother tries to help me and then asks me a million questions.
- 3) We took a journey to the fourth floor of the building.

Directions: Now write your own sentence using quotation marks to show irony.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_

## 3) To show an unusual usage of a word or phrase

Example: It seems difficult to "know" everything about the human body.

In this example, quotation marks are used to offset the word "know" because it is used in an unusual way. The speaker wants to show that the notion of "knowing" everything about the human body seems somewhat absurd.

Directions: Punctuate the following sentences.

- 1) The judge said that it was time for us to go to jail.

2) Street language is not encouraged in the classroom.

3) The police arrested some overzealous protesters today.

Directions: Now write your own sentence using quotation marks to show irony.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4) To refer to a word itself rather than its associated meaning

Example: The word “cooper” refers to someone who makes barrels.

In this example, quotation marks are used to offset the word “cooper” because the speaker is referring to the word itself rather than its associated meaning.

Directions: Punctuate the following sentences.

1) Plantain starts with a P.

2) The technical term for car is vehicle.

3) The word bee has two E's.

Directions: Now write your own sentence using quotation marks to refer to a word itself, rather than its associated meaning.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5) To refer to nicknames and false titles.

Example: Mike “Kid Dynamite” Tyson is a boxer.

In this example, quotation marks are used to offset a nickname.

Directions: Punctuate the following sentences.

1) The North Carolina Tarheels are playing the Duke Blue Devils in basketball tonight.

2) Nat King Cole is not really a king in the literal sense.

3) Richard The Flash Thomas is racing his car tonight.

Directions: Now write your own sentence using quotation marks to refer to nicknames and false titles.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

# Apostrophes

The apostrophe has two primary functions:

- 1) to show possession of a noun
  - 2) to show the omission of letters
- 

## 1) to show possession of a noun

- add 's to the singular form of the word (even if it ends in -s):

I drive near the president's house every day.

I like James's car.

- add ' to the end of plural nouns that end in -s:

These are my sisters' dresses.

These are my friends' pencils.

- add 's to the last noun to show joint possession of an object:

We are at Todd and Anne's apartment.

**Note:** Apostrophes should not be used with possessive pronouns because possessive pronouns already show possession -- they don't need an apostrophe. *His, her(s), its, my, mine, your(s), our(s), their(s)* are all possessive pronouns.

**Note:** As a general rule, if the possessive noun is an inanimate object (not living, no causal agency) then no apostrophe is needed. There are exceptions to this rule, however.

**Example:** That is the door of the car. → That is the car door.

In the example, notice that the car does not need a possessive apostrophe because it is an inanimate object.

**Directions:** Change the “\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_” phrases into possessive noun phrases using an apostrophe.

**Example:** That is the house of David. → That is David's house.

1) This is the shoe of the girl. → \_\_\_\_\_.

2) We are at the room of the hotel. → \_\_\_\_\_.

3) He is the son of Marcus. → \_\_\_\_\_.

4) This is the house of Julie and Juan. → \_\_\_\_\_.

- 5) Please close the door of the car. → \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 6) The flowers of the plant are red. → \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 7) The website of the College is confusing. → \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 8) I want to play the guitar of Ernesto. → \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 9) Do you want to walk to the side of the river? → \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 10) I want to ride in the car of Bobbie. → \_\_\_\_\_.
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## 2) to show the omission of letters and to form contractions

- Apostrophes are used to show any omission of letters in a word.
- Apostrophes are also used to form contractions. A contraction is a combination of two words which results in a single word. The apostrophe is used where letters have been omitted. Contractions are common in speaking and in informal writing.
- Here are some examples of contractions:

### *Affirmative Contractions*

Pronoun	+ to be		+ would	+ will
<b>I</b>	I am	I'm	I'd	I'll
<b>you</b>	you are	you're	you'd	you'll
<b>we</b>	we are	we're	we'd	we'll
<b>they</b>	they are	they're	they'd	they'll
<b>he</b>	he is	he's	he'd	he'll
<b>she</b>	she is	she's	she'd	she'll
<b>it</b>	it is	it's	it'd	it'll
<b>there</b>	there is:	there's	there'd	there'll
<b>that</b>	that is	that's	this'd	this'll

**Note:** the only time you need to use an apostrophe for "it is" is when forming the contraction "it's".  
 "Its" (with no apostrophe) is used to show possession.

### *Negative Contractions*

Verb + not	Contraction
do not	don't
does not	doesn't
did not	didn't
is not	isn't
are not	aren't
was not	wasn't
were not	weren't
has not	hasn't
have not	haven't
had not	hadn't
will not	won't
would not	wouldn't
can not	can't
could not	couldn't
should	shouldn't

**Directions:** Use apostrophes in the following sentences to make contractions.

**Example:** I am your friend. → I'm your friend.

- 1) I do not like vanilla ice cream. → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) I am going to the mall. → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) Who is the new student? → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4) They are my best friends. → \_\_\_\_\_.



- 5) We are not waiting in the line. → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6) She will be the class president. → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7) He should not worry so much. → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8) They will be here in fifteen minutes. → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 9) Where is my blue book? → \_\_\_\_\_.
- 10) She does not eat spinach. → \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use what you have learned to punctuate the following sentences with apostrophes.

**Example:** Where is the book of John? → Where's John's book?

- 1) This is not the key I was looking for.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 2) I want to pet the head of the dog.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 3) That is the hat of Jones.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 4) I need to go to the market of the town to buy milk.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 5) Did you not wash the car of Bill?

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 6) This wallet belongs to Tito.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 7) This one is nicer than the one that Dan has.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 8) It is funny when the dog chases its tail.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 9) We should not take the car of my father to the beach.

\_\_\_\_\_.

- 10) She is the best student in the college.

\_\_\_\_\_.

# The Colon

**The Colon can be used in the following 7 ways:**

- 1) Before a list that is introduced by a complete sentence.  
*Example:* The reporter interviewed the following people: the department heads, the members of the faculty council, and a representative group of students.
- 2) To introduce the effect, or logical consequence of an action.  
*Example:* There was only one way he could win: he had to cheat.
- 3) Before a quotation.  
*Example:* This is what Plato had to say about mathematicians: "I have hardly ever known a mathematician who was capable of reasoning."
- 4) After the salutation in a business letter or memo.  
*Example:* Dear Senator Harkin:
- 5) To separate chapter and verse in scripture.  
*Example:* The Sunday school class studied James 4:10
- 6) To separates hours from minutes.  
*Example:* Our soccer game starts at 7:30.
- 7) To show ratios.  
*Example:* Pour in the milk and water at a 3:1 ratio.

**Directions:** Fill in the missing colons.

- 1) I gave you the spray bottles for one reason to clean the windows.
- 2) You will need the following ingredients milk, sugar, flour, and eggs.
- 3) Johann set the alarm clock for 6 00.
- 4) My father ended every conversation the same way "Don't give up."
- 5) Dear Mr. Kurasu of the Kiragowa Corporation
- 6) Mix the oil and vinegar at a 1 2 ratio.
- 7) I have invited the following people to my party Kevin, Amy, and Keeley.
- 8) There is only one way to make it to the top hard work.
- 9) The soldier shouted the following before leaving to war "We shall return victorious!"

# Semicolons

The semicolon has three primary functions:

- 1) To combine two closely related complete sentences (independent clauses) which are not joined by a conjunction.
  - 2) To separate complete sentences (independent clauses) that are joined by a conjunctive adverb.
  - 3) To separate items in a list when commas alone would be confusing.
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- 1) To combine closely related complete sentences (independent clauses) which are not joined by a conjunction.

Example: The man was wet; he was standing in the rain without an umbrella.

In this example, there are two complete sentences (independent clauses):

#1: *"The man was wet."* (independent clause)

#2 *"He was standing in the rain without an umbrella."* (independent clause)

These clauses are separated by a *semicolon*.

Directions: Use a semicolon in the appropriate place to combine the following independent clauses.

- 1) I am hot I am wearing a sweater and a jacket.
- 2) The president was very popular he easily won the election.
- 3) I cannot buy a new car I do not have much money.

- 2) To separate complete sentences (independent clauses) that are joined by a conjunctive adverb.

Here is a list of common conjunctive adverbs:

in addition	thus	nevertheless	therefore	still	however	indeed	furthermore	then
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Example: Jane likes fruit; however, she does not like apples.

In this example, there are two complete sentences (independent clauses):

#1: “*Jane likes fruit.*” (independent clause)

#2 “*She does not like apples.*” (independent clause)

These clauses are separated by a *semicolon* and the conjunctive adverb “*however*”.

Directions: Use a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb to combine the following independent clauses.

- 1) I am wearing a sweater and a jacket \_\_\_\_\_ I am cold.
- 2) The old dog is blind \_\_\_\_\_ it is deaf.
- 3) Mix all the ingredients \_\_\_\_\_ put the batter in the oven.

3) To separate items in a list when commas alone would be confusing.

Example: The school specializes in three fields of study: economics, the study of the economy; philosophy, the study of thought; and anthropology, the study of mankind.

Directions: Use a semicolon in the appropriate place to separate items in a list in the following sentences.

- 1) The answers to the test are: 1, A 2, D 3, F and 4, B.
- 2) The group was composed of three young people: Mary, who was 32 years old Javier, who was 28 years old and Ming, who was 17 years old.
- 3) On the trip, we drove through Tampa, Florida Wichita, Kansas and Fresno, California.

c. I went to the co-op.

I went to the chicken coop.

### **Review and Practice: Hyphen**

Choose the correct sentence in each pair.

#### **Example**

- a. Please write the commen-

tary.

- b. Please write the commentar-

y.

1. a. The principle of the inven-  
tion was not stated.

- b. The principle of the invent-  
ion was not stated.

2. a. The paper said the a-  
ttack failed.

- b. The paper said the at-  
tack failed.

3. a. Alfred resigned as a trustee of the universit-  
y.

- b. Alfred resigned as a trustee of the univer-  
sity.

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## Dash

Dashes are used to set off parenthetical expressions and abrupt changes in thought when other marks of punctuation are inadequate.

### Examples

- a. Snyder spoke to Jones - **a hard man to please** - about the assignment in Boston.
- b. The weather report - **wrong for the sixth day in succession** - necessitated a change in my plans.
- c. The candidate - **I should have introduced you to him** - was very impressive.

*Do **not** use dashes as substitutes for more appropriate punctuation marks.*

### Examples

- a. with dashes: The speaker - **looking like a Neanderthal man** - discussed the perils of speculation in an unstable stock market.

revised: The speaker, looking like a Neanderthal man, discussed the perils of speculation in an unstable stock market.

- b. with dashes: The lily of the valley — my favourite flower — is out of season.

revised: The lily of the valley, my favourite flower, is out of season.

## Review and Practice: Dash

**Section A.** Set off parenthetical expressions and abrupt changes in thought with dashes.

### Example

The onion soup mine had Gruyère cheese in it was the best I have ever tasted.

revised The onion soup — mine had Gruyère cheese in it — was the best I have ever tasted.

1. He was tall six feet seven and carried himself well.

2. His handwriting it resembled my mother's was almost indecipherable.
3. The sample of my blood I volunteered to give it will be used for enzyme studies.
4. Sid's auto accident I did not tell you about that resulted in his license being revoked.
5. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse conquest, slaughter, famine, death are pictured as riding horses of various colours.

**Section B** Replace any unnecessary dashes with preferred punctuation.

Example

On November 22nd — a clear and sunny day — the assassination took place in Dallas.

revised: On November 22nd, a clear and sunny day, the assassination took place in Dallas.

1. This solution — which Jack never considered — proved to be a good one.
2. The machinery — which has been stored in the barn for a year — may be reparable.
3. Edward — Fourth Earl of Glockenspiel — was drummed out of court.
4. Cud-chewing, hollow-horned animals — oxen, sheep, antelope — belong to the Family *Bovidae*.
5. The lake water — brackish and stinking — is no longer fit for human use.

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Parentheses ( )

**Parentheses** are used to enclose incidental explanatory matter, that is not considered of major importance.

1. To enclose an expression remotely related to context.

e.g. Her condition (I hope you will forgive my referring to it again) must be discussed now.

2. To enclose explanations and directions to the reader.

e.g., The gear shift levers (Fig 1c) must be adjusted carefully.

e.g., The commas (see Punctuation Sheet #3) has a variety of uses.

3. For setting off incidental matter, commas, dashes, and parentheses are frequently interchangeable. Commas and dashes are more common than parentheses.

4. Punctuation marks are used within parentheses when they belong with the parenthetical matter. Punctuation marks which belong with the main part of the sentence are placed after a closing parenthesis.

**Note:** Use parentheses thoughtfully. See that material enclosed within them adds to, rather than distracts from, the ongoing text.

### Review and Practice: Parentheses

Supply parentheses where they are needed to punctuate the following sentences correctly.

e.g., When you reach the overpass (Interstate 75), you will have gone five miles.

1. The star in the play her name is Judy Brown was only seventeen years of age.

2. Skenezer Judd what a strange little man he was kept on whittling his stick.

3. Please return your answer certified mail as soon as possible.

4. Mr. Thornton looked at me disapprovingly. He always looked at me disapprovingly. Then he said, "And what excuse have you this time?"

5. The directions see Booklet A are rather hard to follow.

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